

A Lowell Rebuffs Johnson

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By Albin Krebs

of The Herald Tribune Staff

Robert Lowell, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and relative of the New England literary Lowells, has told President Johnson he so disapproves of Administration foreign policy that he won't participate in the White House Festival of the Arts.

Mr. Lowell, of 15 W. 67th St., revealed yesterday he had written the President to withdraw his acceptance of an invitation to read some of his poetry at the festival June 14.

"After a week's wondering, I have decided that I am conscience-bound to refuse your courteous invitation," Mr. Lowell said. "I do so now in a public letter because my acceptance has been announced in the newspapers, and because of the strangeness of the Administration's recent actions."

Mr. Lowell, a great-grandnephew of James Russell Lowell and a cousin of Amy Lowell, was once consultant in poetry to the Library of Congress. He won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1946, when he was 28, for "Lord Weary's Castle." He is now 48.

Mr. Lowell has always been an individualist. He tried twice to enlist in the Army during World War II, later had a complete change of heart, and became a conscientious objector. That resulted in his spending six months in a Federal prison.

In his letter to the President, Mr. Lowell noted he was "very enthusiastic about most of your domestic legislation and intentions," but "I nevertheless can only follow our present foreign policy with the greatest dismay and distrust."

"What we will do and we ought to do as a sovereign nation facing other sovereign nations seem now to hang in the balance between the better and the worse possibilities," Mr. Lowell continued. "We are in danger of imperceptibly becoming an explosive and suddenly chauvinistic nation, and may even be drifting on our way to the last nuclear ruin."

All things considered, then, Mr. Lowell said, "I feel I am serving you and our country best by not taking part in the White House Festival of the Arts." He said he had accepted the telephoned invitation to appear at the festival "somewhat rapidly and greedily," a week earlier.